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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD, NEA/P, IIP/G/NEA

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: PREAMBLES, PLANES, AND PRAYERS

1. Summary: The Omani Internet message boards "al-Sablah" and "al-Majarra" are the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language fora for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, these popular sites nevertheless offer a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- Iraq's Draft Constitution
-- RAFO's Purchase Of F-16 Aircraft
-- The Friday Mosque Sermon

End summary.

We The People

2. One al-Sablah author described the Iraqi draft constitution as an "achievement" on the road to setting up a democratic system. "If Iraq can reach an agreement, it will be the first Arab nation to be governed by a constitution crafted by the will of the people," the author stated. Roughly a third of respondents agreed with the author, writing "We look forward to the Iraqis recovering from their old wounds to rebuild their country" and "We must discard pessimism and narrow-mindedness, and look at the bright side of this constitution."

3. However, the remaining two-thirds called the constitution into question. One contributor suggested, "It is not an Iraqi constitution, but rather an Iranian/American creation. The Americans opened the game by making the Kurds in the north fight the Shiites in the south." Another wrote, "The real goal of the so-called constitution is to rob the Iraqis of their resources, divide them into separate ethnic groups, and erase the Arab/Islamic identity of the Iraqi Sunnis."

Into The Wild Blue Yonder

4. In a topic that generated over 3,600 hits, al-Sablah participants generally praised the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) for their procurement of F-16 aircraft. "Congratulations to RAFO for their new equipment," wrote one member, "and I hope that we will never need to use them." Another stated, "I support the acquisition of the latest technology for our armed forces, provided that there are enough experts and professionals to use the technology properly." Other observers hailed the purchase as "keeping up with the UAE," while a small minority complained that some of the aircraft's parts are Israeli-made.

Living In A Material World

5. The theme of last Friday's mosque sermon raised the ire of numerous al-Sablah members. Forum participants described the gist of the Friday prayers as "Renounce worldly pleasures and lead an ascetic life; in other words, be content with what you have and don't think about improving your situation." Angered by the perceived ulterior motive behind this theme - the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs approves each Friday's sermon - one respondent asserted, "It seems the 'hamour' [slang for wealthy, influential people] do not like citizens demanding even small services from the government." Another asked, "Is the government really asking us not to pursue salary increases, or even the improvement of basic social services?" Declared one member, "They have forgotten that money is the backbone of society, and that through investment, society is nourished."

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